The Anima in the Web: An Archetypal Analysis of the film, *The Social Network*

Michaella Montana

Department of Jungian and Archetypal Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute

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Instructor: Keiron Le Grice, Ph,D

Dylan Hoffman, Ph.D

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It is hard to imagine the internet without Facebook; it has tapped a common social nerve and become one of the most visited websites on the web (Neufield 2021). Such a massive following indicates Facebook is appealing to a fundamental part of human psychology. Perhaps Facebook is captivating the collective psyche, based on the ontological idea, or theoretical assumption in depth psychology that there is a collective unconscious. This link between a collective unconscious and "social media," (a category Facebook is included in as it facilitates a virtual means of expression in an online community), has been recognized as an important area of study, albeit in need of development and contemplation. In her article, "Social Media and the Collective Unconscious", Jungian analyst Jane Clapp notes on the topic of social media: "The more time I spend immersing myself in the Jungian world in both training and supervision, the clearer it is becoming that most Jungians have underestimated or disregarded the prolific impact of this cultural phenomenon on the individual and collective psyche (Clapp 2022, 114)."

To further explore this social media phenomenon that Facebook is a part of, one might explore the origin story of Facebook for pieces of the creator in the creation, as Aaron Sorkin (writer) and David Fincher (director) have in

their masterpiece of a film*, the Social Network*, based on the book *The Accidental Billionaires* by Ben Mezrich. The film portrays the genesis of the website along with the subsequent legal litigations Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of the website, endured on his journey to bring Facebook into the world. In this paper, I will be analyzing the film *the Social Network* for the Jungian themes of anima, shadow, trickster, ego, and persona to help uncover these psychological underpinnings in the widespread cultural phenomenon of the social media website, Facebook.

The epistemology, or the way of knowing, here, is examining a creation myth for Jungian themes that are relevant to the current situation of cultural and social connectivity on the internet. The methodology, or method from depth psychology utilized is Jungian film analysis. The thematic conclusions drawn from the film could have relevance in the current use of the website as director Aaron Sorkin affirms in an interview that “there was nothing in the movie that was invented for the sake of making it sensational. There was nothing in the movie that was Hollywood-ized” (Canavese 2010). Thus, the methodology of examining the film can legitimately facilitate exploring the creation myth of Facebook, gleaning insights that are translatable to the broader population’s current use of it.

The Social Network begins with a break-up between the protagonist Mark Zuckerberg and his girlfriend Erika in a pub in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Mark Zuckerberg and Erika are in accelerated dialogue, discussing genius IQs in China. In Jungian terms, we might say that although archetypal logos, he is attempting to connect with his anima, which Jung defines as “the eternal image of woman” (Jung 2014, 198) or the feminine ideal as channeled by Erika. In this dialogue, Mark reveals that he is hoping to get accepted into exclusive final clubs, which are Ivy league fraternities. Here we start to see how his anima ideal is caught up in his shadow. Jung describes the shadow as “the invisible saurian tail that man still drags behind him” (Jung 1939) which in Mark Zuckerberg’s case is the shadow of lack of social approval.

As Mark tries so hard to connect with Erika, his anima reveals to him her animus, or her male ideal as Erika says “I do like guys who row crew” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010), and when Mark questions her on specifically which crew guys she likes she responds “I like the idea of it the way a girl likes cowboys” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010), reflecting an archetypal animus. This further catalyzes Mark’s defensiveness of social inferiority as Erika’s animus collides with his anima. Mark’s shadow is further revealed as he demonstrates hypersensitivity when Erika asks which final club would be the easiest to get into, as if she were insinuating that he would only be able to get into the easiest one. Erika replies that he is obsessed with final clubs, to which Mark replies they are “exclusive and fun and lead to a better life” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010) and introduce her to people she would not, which

Erika takes offense at. The conversation spirals as Mark suggests that Erika does not have to study because she goes to Boston University, a less prestigious college, further projecting his shadow of social inferiority onto her. Erika responds to this projection of inferiority by rejecting him, telling him that he will “go through life thinking girls don’t like him because he’s a nerd, but this is not true, girls won’t like him because he’s an a**hole” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010). On that note she gets up and leaves. This scene shows the core interplay between anima and shadow of social rejection that characterizes Mark’s struggle. Through the rest of the film, and through all Mark’s social triumphs and travails of Facebook, “the one standing closest behind the shadow is the anima” (Jung 1959, 270).

In the next scene we see Mark running, not walking through streets of Cambridge like the archetype of Hermes the trickster. The music is enveloping, as if something big and Promethean is about to happen with the trickster moving through the social structure in Boston. We follow Mark into the exclusive Harvard campus and wonder why after making it into the top university in the world, he is still insecure. Mark returns to his dormroom after his rejection from his anima figure of Erika and proceeds to project his shadow onto her as he blogs that “all BU (Boston University) girls are bitches” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010). He makes attacks on Erika’s body and bra cup size, demonstrating how “shadow projections hardly ever occur without being tied to some physical feature, to women’s bodies, to

skin color, to facial features, musculature, vocal tones, etc”(Hoffman, Module 6, Class Lecture DJA 800). Thus, in blogging about Erika after being rejected by her, Mark is confronting both his anima and his shadow. Incidentally, in the present day, this anima-shadow projection of body judgement has carried over to the current use of the website. For instance, a study of one thousand high school girls found a correlation between social media use and body image concern (Tiggemann, M. and Slater, A.E. 2013). Another study found that fifty-five percent of people who got plastic surgery did so to look good in “selfies” (Rajanala S, Maymone MBC, Vashi NA 2018). There is a link, therefore between the atmosphere of the creator (Mark) and the creation (Facebook) seen in the anima-shadow of social rejection both in the creation myth and the current repercussions of the use of Facebook.

In the film, amidst the shadow projections, Mark fixates on the fact that Erika has a nice face and constellates the Trickster archetype to distract himself from it. He constellates the trickster by trying to come up with an idea that will alleviate this rejection while unconscious/intoxicated. Jung defines the trickster as “a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level” (Jung 1959, 260). Mark, intoxicated, decides to hack into the “Facebook” pages of seven Harvard undergrad houses and create a game where one chooses between two women, deciding which one is “hotter,” in a way reflecting an animalistic consciousness. In the film, this

coding is juxtaposed with scenes of finals clubs and their Dionysian fun. As the trickster, Zuckerberg is not only straddling Internet life and the real world, but also the collective world of finals clubs and the Venusian women they attract as we see buses full of beautiful women shuttled to the historic, exclusive world of the final clubs. As the trickster, he is embodying the adolescent psychology, which has “hardly left the animal level” (Jung 1959, 260), bridging the worlds between the animalistic unconscious and collective consciousness in technology.

We are next introduced to Mark’s friend Eduardo, wearing all black, perhaps reflecting Mark’s shadow, who shares his algorithm for ranking girls. Thus is born “Facesmash,” bringing together Mark’s shadow of social judgement with his anima of beautiful girls. The trickster messenger is constellated as they share the website with friends. It spreads like wildfire throughout the campus at four in the morning, receiving 22,000 hits within the first hour. The game receives so much traffic that Harvard’s network crashes, further evidence that the trickster is tapping into a collectively shared shadow of desired social acceptance in service of the anima.

The scene then switches to litigation as a reflection of the social trouble Mark faces. We are introduced to the Winklevoss twins, two rowers who gain interest in Mark after he crashes Harvard’s network. Almost immediately after their introduction we see a litigation scene from them,

followed by a scene of charges filed against him by the school, where Zuckerberg apologizes but then says he deserves recognition for showing the problems with the security system, in true trickster fashion of trying to wake people up through technology. For this, Mark receives six months academic probation, showing again the social strife he endures in his pursuit of the anima. These successive litigation scenes show the many permutations of his shadow of social rejection despite his struggle for social approval with Facebook.

Back at Harvard, Eduardo laments how Mark got all the girls to hate them, demonstrating how Mark's efforts to overcome his shadow led to the opposite desired effect. Mark then runs into the Winklevoss twins who invite him into the Porcellian (final club) bike room. Looking at the photos on the wall, Mark feels the shadow of exclusion of not being able to enter the club itself, only getting up to the bike room—even when asked to be the Winklevoss' partner for their website of the Harvard connection. We then see Mark and his friends at a Caribbean night party. Here we feel Mark's shadow again as his friend Eduardo got "punched" or invited to try out for the final club, the Phoenix, moving toward the social acceptance Mark so desired. We can feel the competition between the friends, though Eduardo says it is just a diversity thing (Fincher and Sorkin 2010).

It is here that Mark introduces the idea of building a website that allows people to check out their friends on the internet, bringing the social experience of college to the internet. The exclusivity of finals clubs would be translated virtually as one would have to know the person to get past one's own page. Like getting "punched", one would need an internet invitation. Mark's shadow of social insecurity was thus built into the site. He then asks Eduardo for money to get it started, which further demonstrates the shadow archetype social inferiority in needing other people's money. Finally, Mark says to Eduardo about getting punched it probably was a diversity thing, showing the shadow of social competition again.

In the next court room scene, we see the repercussions of Mark starting his own website despite being asked to help on the Winklevoss website. Eduardo testifies at the litigation that Mark found the Winklevoss website pathetic, revealing Mark's ego as he compared his work to competitors who already had privilege. This suggests a compensation, as he wanted to be invited to the club the Winklevosses were a part of, but didn't get past the bike room and resented that the Winklevosses thought he had to rehabilitate his image with "Facesmash." Furthermore, Mark was communicating with the Winklevoss twins at same time he was building Facebook, repeatedly saying he was too busy, in what was perhaps a subconscious response to overcome his feelings of inferiority of not being a part of their final club. This demonstrates how the "Ego is a controlled

space, and leaves out everything that threatens this—in other words, everything that doesn't feel controllable, that feels powerful, autonomous, spontaneous, instinctual" (Hoffman, Module 6, Class Lecture, DJA 800). Mark is threatened by the Winklevosses, because his ego cannot control getting into a final club and thus leaves them out as he designs his own site.

The next scene begins with Mark's friend asking him if the girl in art history class has a boyfriend. Mark, in a sleepy stupor, explains "People don't walk around with a sign on them that says I'm…" (Fincher and Sorkin 2010). Inspired by this conversation, Mark then runs to put in a "relationship status" algorithm in Facebook. Here, as a trickster, Mark is revealing the interface between the ego and the persona, which Jung defines as "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual" (Jung, 1966, 192). The ego is striving for survival both biologically and socially in relationship, and the persona is helping display the social mask to allow this to happen. This is because "objectively, we all need other people in order to survive physically and psychologically. The ego's movement toward relationship and adaptation to the present milieu, which seeks to ensure survival, provides the opportunity for the persona to take hold. And this then becomes a person's self-presentation to the world" (Stein 1998, 117). In college the student's ego strives to be in relationship in the new social fabric, a mighty task for the persona, which is also shown by the profile

picture on Facebook. The relationship status on the Facebook page shows this struggling ego to be in relationship reflected in the persona with the anima in the background of the relationship status.

As the film continues, social upheaval ensues as Winklevosses find out about the website and say Mark stole their idea, since the idea of needing a Harvard.edu email to register began with them. The litigation shows how Mark is condescending toward those who come from money, and money in general. This reveals how “you can almost guess what resides in the Shadow by listening for what someone denounces, decries, and disavows” (Hoffman, Module 6, Class Lecture, DJA 800). In Mark’s case the shadow is carried by those who come from money and carry prestige from connections, and it is interesting how he in real life became ridiculously wealthy and perhaps has integrated his shadow. The next scene shows how both the Winklevosses and his friend Eduardo (also both of whom sue him in the movie) reside in this shadow as Eduardo says it is time to monetize the site and finds the cease and desist from the Winklevosses. To his friend, he is dismissive over the idea of bringing advertising money into the site because he says Facebook is “cool” a priceless asset he is not willing to give up. Toward the cease and desist letter, he is essentially disavowing the Winklevosses as he projects his own feeling of unimportance onto those who come from money and are in the historically prestigious exclusive group.

Even when Facebook's "coolness" almost brings Mark social acceptance, the shadow is always right around the corner along with the anima. For instance, in the next scene, two girls invite Mark and Eduardo on a date by saying "Facebook me" a collective phrase and then proceed to perform sexual favors on them in the bathroom of a pub in Cambridge. This social sexuality is congratulated as Mark and Eduardo stand outside the bathroom, waiting for the girls to freshen up and another man trying to get into the bathroom thinks that is cool. Nonetheless, right behind this ostensible social acceptance is his shadow and anima, as Mark sees his ex-girlfriend Erika in the same bar. Like a moth to a flame, Mark goes to talk to her but gets rejected again as she reminds him of how he made comments on her body and compared women in Facesmash. Further, Erika has never heard of Facebook. Infuriated, he leaves and says he has to expand the website to Yale and Columbia and get a story in the BU student newspaper (so he can impress Erika his ex-girlfriend). Thus continues the tension between his shadow of social acceptability and his anima.

Next, the scene changes to Sean Parker in California who sees the Facebook website. Sean is a successful entrepreneur who founded Napster a free music streaming website. When Mark meets Sean, he really likes him as he agrees that what Facebook has going for it is its cool factor and that monetizing it is not cool. Sean Parker is an entrepreneur in California and has a persona Mark can strive for. Sean Parker contributes to the persona

of the company itself as he says to “drop the ‘the’ just Facebook, it is cleaner” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010). This shows how “the creation” itself is going through evolution that mirror’s the creator, Mark’s own struggle for self-presentation. Mark is open to following Sean as he considers moving to California for the summer to work on Facebook. However, to do this he has to lean into his shadow of lack of social currency with Eduardo once again as he asks him for another $18,000 to go live in California. Thus, in his pursuit of being popular and accepted in with Sean in California, Mark’s shadow in his friend Eduardo still follows him.

Mark then moves to California for the summer and Sean Parker happens to live across the street. They go to a raunchy social club where, in conversation, Sean Parker admits he started Napster to impress a girl. Mark asks, “Do you ever think about that girl?” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010). Here again we see how amidst all the social happenings and internet success, Mark is still doing all of this for the anima. Eduardo then shows up in the rain outside the Palo Alto house. Mark was supposed to pick him up at the airport but forgot, showing his neglect of the shadow, and his shadow is not happy about it. Eduardo feels a tension with Sean Parker who is doing what was supposed to be Eduardo’s job. Further, Mark says if Eduardo does not come to California, he might get left behind, and next thing we know Eduardo freezes the bank account, the shadow challenging the expansion and begging to be seen.

Mark's shadow and the shadow of Facebook grow as Eduardo encounters a relationship problem with the girl who had said "Facebook me" to go out on a date. She asks him why his status says single on his relationship page? (Fincher and Sorkin 2010) Eduardo admits he does not know how to change his relationship status on Facebook. She does not believe him and thinks he did not change it so he could have affairs with "silicon valley sluts" (Fincher and Sorkin 2010) on his trip there, which was entirely untrue. Eduardo's girlfriend then lights the present he bought for her on fire and leaves. This shows how a social resistance to change can have disastrous effects in the social media world, where life is continually "updating," and result in female rage, the negative side of the anima.

The relational confrontations escalate as Mark realizes Eduardo froze the bank account and put the entire site at risk. Mark asks Eduardo "Do you like being nobody? Do you want to go back to being a joke?" (Fincher and Sorkin 2010) demonstrating his shadow fear of social irrelevance. Mark then delivers news about the angel investors and sets up the new office. Eduardo then signs papers, which, unbeknownst to him, result in his Facebook shares being diluted down to .03%. Mark's exclusion of Eduardo shows how "the ego excludes what it perceives as threatening, which colors everything in the Shadow in a negative light" (Hoffman, Module 6, Class Lecture DJA 800). Eduardo freezing the accounts was a threat to the

company, but in a larger sense Eduardo represented the threat of social exclusion as he was invited to the final club and Mark was not. Eduardo leaves, saying he is coming back for everything. Back at the deposition Eduardo says to Mark, you had one friend, showing the tragedy of it all as he let his one friend in real life go to create a website whose basis is having “friends” and let his ego deny the shadow.

In the final conversation in the film, Mark tells a lawyer intern that he is not a bad guy. She says she knows, and that “Creation myths need a devil” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010), showing the resistance his social group had toward him in bringing Facebook to the world. She then says to him “You’re not an asshole, you’re just trying so hard to be” (Fincher and Sorkin 2010) bringing back the phrase his ex- girlfriend said to him in the beginning. In his ego’s battle with the shadow of social exclusion he was becoming what he feared. And behind all the social turmoil and the shadow there is still the anima. In the end he literally searches for his ex-girlfriend on Facebook. After some hesitation, he sends her a friend request, and keeps refreshing the page, returning where he started. In this way the anima “sums up everything that a man can never get the better of and never finishes coping with” (Jung 1959, 271). Despite all the success of Facebook he still returns to searching for the girl who rejected him for he hasn’t gotten over it, for one can never really get over the anima.

The film, *The Social Network* illustrates how Mark Zuckerberg, when at the top of the social selecting process at Harvard University, created an Internet ode to the anima archetype. This anima is “always the a priori element in [a man’s] moods, reactions, impulses, and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life (Jung 1959, 27). The draw of Facebook is its ability to capture this elusive a priori anima behind all the unconscious shadow processes and then reveal her Venusian selecting process on the website. Through one’s persona, one can create their ideal offering to the anima, “for it is the anima that reacts to the persona” (Jung 1953, 194-195) and be rewarded for it with likes, as the collective goes on searching for the anima. These likes then service the ego when the collective anima gives recognition.

Examining Facebook today, one can see how the current collectively generated virtual anima tethers ego to persona. One’s ego gets entangled with the collective anima’s view of one’s photos, including one’s profile picture. This is further shown with the migration from Facebook to Instagram, which are both owned by Mark Zuckerberg. On Facebook, in addition to photos, there is an anima selection process based on the written word in the news feed, which results in the news feed becoming questionable because the anima will still select for what gets the most likes. Instagram, however links ego to persona all the more as it is only images that get portrayed on the app. Instead of thumbs up “likes” one gets from

Facebook, it is Venusian “hearts” one gets for approval from Instagram. Instead of friends, one has followers, the shadow of the ego-persona on the app. This attachment of ego to persona can make living in the real world difficult as it lacks this anima perfection. This feedback is especially impactful for artists, as a study by Hallinan and Brubanker found that the feedback from Instagram influenced the way they not only created their art but also how they viewed themselves (Hallinan and Brubanker, 2021). The virtual anima on social media, or the eternal image of woman an create struggles in reality due to the impossibility of fully embodying the archetype.

Through Mark’s journey in college, we see the process of his ego trying to exist in the social realm of Harvard while searching for the anima but coming up against a persona problem of not having the persona that would allow him to enter into the elite final clubs. Murray Stein writes of this process, “By early adulthood, one hopes that sufficient development has taken place in both ego and persona so that the ego’s dual needs for independence and relationship are satisfied, while at the same time the persona has made a suitable enough adaptation so that the ego can live in the real world” (Stein 1998, 117). In the film, we see how Mark struggles with a suitable enough persona for his ego to live in the real world so he brings the problem of persona to the virtual world.

Along with bringing the persona and ego to the virtual world the film has also captured an anima possession that correlates with the current state of Facebook and Instagram. Mark Zuckerberg has brought us all on the journey of reaching for the anima through an ego persona on the internet. On Facebook we are all like Mark, continually refreshing the website waiting for the anima to reward our ego persona with acceptance. With the positive feedback from the collective anima our ego wants more and more to identify with the persona for it feels the dopaminergic rush of approval from the simulated site. This could stunt individuation, as “identity with the persona automatically leads to an unconscious identity with the soul because, when the ego is not differentiated from the persona, it can have no conscious relation to the unconscious processes”(Jung 1923, 596). This results with living more and more in a simulated anima world without the equal pole in the real world.

On the one hand, Facebook and Instagram can be useful in showing us our anima in the passive world of the internet womb. It can also reveal to us which persona integrates most readily into the collective hypothetically. The challenge comes because the anima is so addicting, the approval so enticing, and the ego so eager to identify with only the conscious good. We search for anima perfection online but are left with our imperfections in reality which our ego has a difficult time identifying with, causing a split between our real life and our online identity.

On the other hand, if one completely breaks from social media, as I have, one might experience a loss of an online persona. I deleted my Facebook account after dropping out of medical school and thus lost that active persona that was part of an online community. Part of this was because my ego could not handle the loss of medical student persona. I am therefore realizing the importance of the ego in holding a relative presence online. Thus, leaving social media altogether may also prevent the experience of developing and adapting a presentable persona on the internet. The psychological dynamics on Facebook are still evolving and there is still room for investigation on how to utilize the website both on one's own and in community.

In conclusion, the archetypal themes of anima, shadow, trickster, ego, and persona can be found in the film *The Social Network* and can help reveal these psychological dynamics in the widespread phenomenon of social media. In particular, *The Social Network* illustrates how through Mark's struggle with the persona and ego, he brought the anima into the internet sphere and captivated millions of people. This exposed the world to the struggle with the anima, which Jung called the "masterpiece" of individuation" (Jung 1959, 29). This struggle, however, can only be overcome if one can "disengage the ego from all its entanglements with collectivity and the collective unconscious. Through this process the anima

forfeits the daemonic power of an autonomous complex” (Jung 1953, 227). Among the other archetypes, Facebook has captured the autonomous complex of the anima that is immersed in the collectivity. For those who are called to individuation, this communal anima in the web can be a most useful introduction to what one might consciously integrate personally, yet also disentangled from hopefully without dismissing altogether. In this way, technology can reveal psychological processes Jung discovered and perhaps help us understand these concepts amidst the collective on our journey toward wholeness.

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Bio

Michaella Montana is an avid investigator currently pursuing an MA in Jungian and Archetypal Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She holds a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Biochemistry from Wellesley College. She is a lifelong learner of the human condition and is fascinated by the way psychology and technology can reveal the inner workings of the mind and help heal those who are suffering.

Email: michaellafmontana@gmail.com

Abstract

With the advent of social media, the psychological fabric of society has certainly been impacted, if only from the sheer quantity of time spent on websites. This connectivity has altered relationships as well as introduced opportunities to study the way the collective unconscious functions. An area of particular connectivity is the social media website, Facebook. In this paper I will investigate the film *The Social Network* for archetypal examples, including anima, shadow, trickster, ego, and persona, using a Jungian lens to reveal psychological dynamics both in the story of the creation story of Facebook and in the current use of the website.

Key Words:

anima, shadow, trickster, ego, persona, social media, technology, individuation

APPENDIX A- Jung Journal Culture and Psyche

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